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AUTHOR Lersten, Kenneth
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ABSTRACT

There have been many theories and hypotheses about play, one of which is the equation of play with "transcendence." Play may have the ingredients to allow us to transcend and, for a moment, remythologize life. There have been recent authors who have given play the status of theology, indicating that play contains elements also found in religion. This then is new play. For Neale, play is peace; there is the connotation of meaningfulness; it involves delight. Miller, in his book "God and Games," views play as a response to the introduction of the sacred into our lives. Jurgen Moltmann calls for transcendence of the win-lose nature of much or our play so that we can just simply be who we are in and through play. For Harvey Cox, festivity is a way that humans keep alive to time by relating past, present, and future; play has a festive element. The transcendent view of play is "new" play in the sense that western culture seems to have forgotten how to play. Both physical education and religion of the West have for centuries been practicing a dualism between mind and body. Physical education can be a catalyst for this new play of transcendence by helping us discover that play is natural to humans and comes in many forms. (JA)

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NEW PLAY

Conceptions of play and theories advanced to explain why people play has not been a major thrust of research but, nevertheless, speculation is available. To consider play requires a philosophical orientation that some have been unwilling to adopt since they have not been willing to contemplate man in his wholeness and mystery. A conception of play requires a vision of human nature which is not limited to behavior.

The older theories about why man plays include "surplus energy" explanations which have a physiological basis and relate to a "steam valve" function of play. Species Homo Sapiens, under other explanations, has, like other animals, an instinct to play and a tendency to recapitulate the species' play history. Many have supported the idea that play acts to "prepare" the child via imitation and therefore, safe behavior, for the roles of adulthood. To be sure, man is found playing throughout his life span, not only in childhood. Paiget argues that this early play does have instrumental connections to the development of intellect and helps to formulate reality functioning.

Furthermore, some of the newer explanations for play seem to focus on broad findings from psychology in recent years. We have the constant psychoanalytic companion reminding us to play as

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compensation for or assimilation of unpleasant experiences and that shall continue in the name of Freud. From the behavioral school of thought we have the persuasion that play is a learned part of man's portfolio of behavior and that he is able to generalize this activity wherever there are willing stimuli. A cathartic view of play as well as part is also available. Here, play would be an outlet for "aggressive tendencies" (surplus energy) with a period of relief and relaxation following. Unfortunately, evidence for such a position is nearly non-existent so that the catharsis hypothesis is largely a slogan. Some would argue that play is an arena to test competence and to experience both success and failure in ways that might not damage. A most recent idea is that people play to seek stimuli and levels of arousal not available to them ordinarily.

All of these theories and hypotheses about play are interesting and often the subject of discussion. There are some ideas about play that exert an almost totally contrasting influence and are seldom mentioned. The concept that best meets these ideas is transcendence.

Transcendence is often linked with religions or mythical systems where gods and dieties exist beyond human time. Concepts such as fantasy, day dreaming and imagining are closely linked to transcendence and allow human beings to get beyond reality and existence occasionally. The "peak experience" of Maslow is a super

perceptual state -- a form of sensual opening which can become the vehicle for transcendence. Play may also have the ingredients to allow us to transcend, and, for a moment, remythologize life. Indeed, there have been recent authors (Neal, 1969: Miller, 1969; Moltmann, 1971; Cox, 1969) who have given play the status of a theology, indicating that play contains elements also found in religion. This then is new play.

Neale's (1969) understanding of play is connected to adventure and contains a collection of elements. For Neale, play is <u>peace</u>. Peace is seen as a harmonious status and the absence of conflict. There is the connotation of meaningfulness. <u>Freedom</u> is present. This is "automatic adventure" and release from time and casuality. Play involves <u>delight</u>. Fun, joy and rapture are available in <u>both</u> success and failure. The last element is illusion. For the player, play is not deceptive but for the worker it may be and therefore, an illusion in that sense. The player plays on and realizes that play is illusive because it occurs in this world but is not of this world. Play is viewed by Neale as a response to the sacred and therefore, religious. He contrasts this with magic which, in his view, is a work response to the sacred when the profane (secular) is exclusively used in the response. The point is that the authentic player is able to transcend the profane to experience the sacred. In a sense, play occurs in sacred time as opposed to profane or "world time."

Miller (1969), in his provocative book, Gods and Games, also views play as a response to the introduction of the sacred into our lives but the elements of play are different. He views play as a form of mythology, embedded in the roots of story and game initially and then embellished by the following elements:

1. Aisthesis (Gk) : to know with the entire body; sensational. Aisthesis is the celebration of the senses - a turning on of the senses.

2. Poiesis (Gk) : to make or to do - poetry and poetic form. Poiesis is the pure creation of making and doing - creation in a world of make believe and "as if."

3. Metamophosis (Gk) : from creation to change - developmental and emergent revolution. Metamorphosis is an implosion and then an explosion of change into new forms.

4. Therapeia (Gk) : therapy or the total experience of the senses turned on and imagination at work in a life of doing and creating change.

A recognized theologian, Jurgen Moltmann (1971), has some interesting thoughts on play worth our attention. Nietzsche pointed out that the score would always be Lions 10 and Christians 0, because the Christian motto is "born to lose." Moltmann responds by commenting that winning and losing in games, if viewed playfully, is not the point. There is a need for more creative ways of dealing with "failing" or "losing" but the crucial factor is not to lose one's humanity. If winning or losing one's humanity is the hidden dimension of win-lose play then what role does win-lose play serve? Winning and losing are who we are as creatures of consciousness and being. We do not win or lose but we are ourselves. In short, Moltmann calls for a transcendence of the win-lose nature of much of our play so that we can just simply be who we are in and through play.

The transcendent view of play is new play in the sense that western culture seems to have forgotten how to play. The rise of the intellect and science and its transformation into technology seems to have robbed western man of the playful spirit. We have been concerned with the rational, the secular and the cult of the fact so that we have shaped dualisms of work and play rational and irrational and myth and reality. Our mind and body principle in physical education has resulted in a concern mainly for the physical body but little strategy to influence the mind, spirit or true play of man. Physical education

has, in fact, been dualistic in practice. Religion of the west has also been practicing a dualism for centuries which leaves man's body at the church door and ministers to his mind. Since western man has rationalized life and experience, the church has confined religious experience to a definite set of boundaries for physical experiences and by so doing, has severely limited the playfulness of man. When physical education talks about but then neither plans or cares for the whole person, it is dualistic and therefore damaging to the playful nature of man.

Huizina (1950, p. 46) has said:

> "It has not been difficult to show that a certain play factor was extremely active all through the cultural process and that it produces many of the fundamental forms of social life. The spirit of playful competition is, as a social impulse, older than culture itself. Ritual grew up in sacred play and nourished on play. Music and dancing were pure play. We have concluded therefore, that civilization is, in its earliest phases, played."

What a remarkable quote about play and its importance to a culture. It would seem that playfulness must be preserved and extended so that many will continue to transcend the ordinary in order to dream and to create. Physical Education must help to foster play and not hinder it by shackling play to sport or athletic boundaries so that play becomes common instead of uncommon and liberating.

In the Feast of Fools, (Harvey Cox (1969) makes a strong analysis and plea for the renewal of playfulness in the western cultures. He delights in the idea that there had actually been a Feast of Fools in the middle ages where people played with social institutions and mocked leaders of the day. These occasions were described as festivals where the human capacity for genuine revelry and celebration are evident. Man is homo festivus when he relives legends, blows out candles on a birthday cake and dresses up to pretend he is someone else. Festivity is conscious excess and socially approved infraction of the norms of ordinary behavior; it is celebrative affirmation of life despite what life brings; it is juxtaposition or a contrast to the usual - an exception. For Cox, festivity is a way that man keeps alive to time by relating past, present and future. Play has a festive element.

A second element in this view is that man is homo fantasia. We live in dual worlds of fact and fantasy and have mistakenly separated them. By separating fantasy from our existence, we have curtailed a rich source of human creativity in suspending the ordinary through imagination. In our haste to explain the world, we have often created idiological ritual where fantasy is regulated into safely accepted molds which become meaningless channels of behavior.

There is a plea for new play in all of this. We need to learn how to celebrate and fantasize and these will lead us to play both as children and as adults. Man is fully human when he plays and play gives the restory suspension of secular time where we can get beyond in fantasy, imagining, illusion and transcendence. In a sense, this re-education needs remythologizing instead of demythologizing at its base. We need to regain a sense of history through game and story drawn through the present and into the future. We need new playgrounds and play time to aid our invention of life.

The future is a form of play. We can predict, imagine and vision the future through our experience, knowledge and ability to transcend. If in play we first experience change and what it would be like, then the first prerequisite for the invention of the future would be play - mind play and body play. We would play for change.

Physical education can be a catalyst for this new play of transcendence by discovering that play is natural to man and comes in many forms and therefore requires invention. It requires the whole man and not the physical man alone and it must contrast with work so that liberation emerges. A contribution of physical education in creating a liveable future for man is surely in helping man to regain his playfulness.

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